

Characteristics of a Future Model AA School and Key Challenges Facing Montana's AA Schools

Prepared by the MTSBA AA Caucus for the Interim Education and Local Government
Committee

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Over the last two years, MTSBA member trustees have met on several occasions to develop, refine and update a summary document to identify the desired characteristics of model public schools in Montana and identify the most important challenges faced by Montana's public schools in pursuing the innovations necessary to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's children.

The characteristics of model schools and identification of challenges in this document are prepared from notes taken during a series of facilitated sessions that took place in June 2010, October 2010 and June 2011. This work is ongoing. Districts of all sizes have plans to continue to refine and update this resource going forward and we have had a great response from trustees interested in continuing to lead this discussion going forward.

MTSBA's intention in maintaining this resource is to ensure a continually-updated contemporary snapshot of the collective and specific beliefs, ideas and goals of elected school board leaders throughout the state regarding Montana's public schools.

Characteristics of a Future Model AA School

As you read through the bulleted list of characteristics of a future model AA school below, you will see some specific ideas that have been identified and also some more conceptual thoughts on what we hope the schools of tomorrow will look like. We would like to focus on a few of the key characteristics today and let you know of our interest in working with the Committee through the Interim and into the next Legislative session in identifying what it will take to move us into the future.

Most frequently cited characteristics:

- All students are life-long learners
- Re-define school day and school year (9PM-1AM vs 7:30AM-12 PM)
- 3 "C"s Career ready, College ready, Citizenship
- School building more for flexible social organization (learning center) than direct instruction
- New definition of "graduation" (4yr, 3-7 yr?)
- Personalized Education Plans for every student
- Higher rates for graduation
 - By adapting to changing world
 - Prepared for workforce or college/votech

- 4yr funnel
- Vision for each high school level
- Make public schools most exciting option
 - Kids want to be there
- Relevant to their lives, futures
- Freshman Academy, sophomore exploration, builds to senior year- best year
- Junior experiences & senior projects
- Classes < 20
- Self-paced learning
- Educationally friendly school design/architecture
- Energy efficient/green
- Personal support at HS level/mentors
- 21st century technology for learning
- Lots of professional development for staff
- Parents engaged in school
- Include all career paths
- Redefine teaching/learning day and year
- Schools have measurable results-graduation tests
- P.E.D. for every student

Provide students with the three “C’s” – Career; College; and Citizenship - Ready

Today’s students and tomorrow’s students are not the same as those in the past. K-12 public education is all about providing students with the skills and abilities they will need to have the greatest chance of a successful future. There are many “C’s” involved when educators talk about “21st Century skills” – Creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration are a few of the skills that are needed for a student to be ready for a career or college, and ready to be a productive citizen in their community.

Higher rates for graduation – by adapting to a changing world and in preparation for postsecondary training

Montana’s AA districts are already committed to increasing our graduation rates – reducing our dropout rates. This is not only in the interests of our schools, but in the interests of students, communities, and society in general. Career opportunities and career earnings clearly expand with high school graduation and postsecondary education and training.

21st Century Learning Environments

Anyone with children or grandchildren knows that the way students learn today is very different than just a few years ago. E-mailing is old hat – the speed and frequency of texting is amazing. We can all anticipate that technology will continue to develop in the future. The key for K-12 education is in how students learn. How do we use technology in teaching and learning?

Closely tied to the use of technology for teaching and learning are the facilities that will be needed or not needed for the future of K-12 education.

Key Challenges Faced by Montana's AA Schools

Not surprisingly, many of the challenges ahead of us are closely linked to the characteristics identified by AA districts. As you look through the list of key challenges identified below, you will see some of the areas that we need your help with. Again, we look forward to working with the Committee as you go forward in trying to address these key challenges.

1. Not "Business as usual"
2. Multiple jobs & careers (more than 1 at a time)
3. More small business, entry- type jobs
4. Involvement of community
5. Retiring population
6. Jobs require 21st century literacy skills (collaborative, team players, critical thinkers)
7. Legislative-flat funding
 - a. How to reconstruct system to live within our means
8. Continued expectation that we will do more with less
9. Economy will be flat for awhile (statewide)
10. Still have increasing costs
11. Pursue legislation to tie CPI to funding
12. More funding tied to competitive grants
13. More modern facilities
14. Reverse anti-public education trend
15. Change how we evaluate students
16. Strong business partnerships
17. Voters that understand schools
18. Higher math/stem achievement
19. No one time only funding
20. More diverse offerings/AP classes
21. Time for technology training
22. Technology barriers/ Outdated buildings/Pace of change
23. Modernize existing school infrastructure
24. IEP for all students
25. Parental involvement

Involvement of Community

In K-12 education we often talk about the need for parental involvement in our schools. But we also need the involvement and collaboration of our communities to address issues of poverty, housing, economics, etc. that play an increasing role in students' ability and willingness to learn.

Jobs require 21st century literacy skills as well as collaboration, team players, and critical thinkers

Business and community leaders are looking for more from today's students than math and reading skills. Creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, and collaboration are learning and innovation skills that have been identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning as essential for student success.

Personalized Education for all students

One of the key notions in K-12 education is that more individualized instruction for students could dramatically improve student achievement. Personalizing education would focus in on what level each student is at in various subjects and how they learn or respond to various teaching methods.

Still have increasing costs

Even without moving to more individualized instruction, the costs of providing K-12 education continue to increase. Not only is education a labor intensive "business", but technology continues to develop, and the number of issues schools are asked to deal with becomes more and more complex.

In summary, we wanted to let you know that we have more on our minds than looking for increased funding. We continue to address issues in K-12 education in our districts and we are seeing some incredible success stories. There is a whole lot that is positive in K-12 education. But we also have some challenges ahead that we need to pay attention to and we ask for your help and your understanding in addressing some of these key areas that are directly tied to student success.